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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests that the teaching of world history from a U.S. and European history viewpoint does not help students understand and develop insights about the contemporary world. The context within which current events occur is more important than simply teaching about specific facts. The process of learning must be considered along with course content when studying other cultures, because approaches to learning may determine what conclusions are reached. Asian Studies in the elementary grades should help students develop skills, positive attitudes, and appreciation for Asian peoples and their cultures. From junior high school through 10th grade the major purpose of Asian Studies should be to help students appreciate the Asian cultures and understand ways in which they function and relate to one another. From grade 11 through higher education graduate courses the focus of Asian Studies should shift to a content orientation, so that students can study specific areas of interest. (JHP)

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ASIAN STUDIES: ORIENTING THE STUDENT, PROCESS, AND CONTENT

BY

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ASIAN STUDIES: ORIENTING THE STUDENT, PROCESS, AND CONTENT

This conference convened by the Committee on Teaching about Asia has special meaning for me. I appreciate and value, of course, your invitation to be your honoree for 1988. I welcome, too, the opportunity to share some reflections and suggestions. Moreover, I am happy and proud to join with you in our continuing efforts to share with others the benefits and pleasures of learning about and from Asia and Asians.

Please permit me a brief reference to my own personal encounter with Asian studies. In many ways, it parallels the evolution in our country of teaching about other cultures. No teacher came to Asian studies with less academic preparation than I did. When I was graduated from the New York State College for Teachers in Albany in 1949, I held a B.A. and M.A. degree in social studies and was considered "certified for life" even though (as I recall) I had taken only one course in Asian studies. My course work at the doctoral level was mainly in American history and education; my dissertation was on the presidential State of the Union message.

My first eight years of teaching also had little to do with Asian studies. The first five were as a high school teacher of social studies and the next three were at the New Jersey State College for Teachers in Montclair. Then it happened. I was invited in 1958 to teach for a year in India as a Fulbright professor. I hadn't applied for the appointment and never even considered doing so. The assignment had come up late, someone had recommended me, and I accepted the offer. Off I went to India with wife, two young children and one on the way.

In India, I taught at the Pedagogic Institute in Allahabad and also conducted about fifteen one-week education workshops in many parts of the country. From those experiences of teaching, maintaining a household, and traveling widely, I learned much about India. Of greater value to my subsequent teaching in the U.S., I learned from India to question and reflect on my cultural perspectives and assumptions.

After returning to Montclair, I offered an introductory course in Asian studies and also became the Associate Director of the summer Institute on Asia Studies at Rutgers University where I began working with teachers on how to teach about Asia. In 1961, I became a consultant to The Asia Society and in 1963 became its education director--a position I held until 1973.

During that period, I had opportunities to meet with thousands of social studies teachers at a time when so-called Non-Western studies were becoming an integral part of the curriculum. Before 1945, the pattern of foreign area studies in American schools was clear. In a course inappropriately titled "World History," students were taught that man's most significant development occurred in Europe and, later, in the United States. Invariably, the course was textbook centered and followed a chronological arrangement. The emphasis was on political history--dates and men, wars and governments. Little attention was given to considerations such as how people lived, what they created, how they viewed themselves and others. It was mainly a study of the American people and our past--from the Tigris-Euphrates valley westward.

A dramatic change in the curriculum began in the early 1950's. American troops were stationed all over the world. And if it can be said that "the American flag follows the American dollar," it can also be said that "the American curriculum follows the American flag." As the United States became a world political power and also extended its global economic investments, our

educational system was expected to prepare students for a future in which Americans would be involved increasingly throughout the world--either personally or through their representatives. The keynote educational speeches of the early 1950's warned that "we can no longer afford the luxury of ignoring three-fourths of the world's people" and that "we must know the nature of our potential enemies."

Because the motivation to study other cultures was at first based on narrowly conceived national interests, our approach to other peoples was largely ethnocentric. The materials tended to specialize in details: listings, pronunciation guides, statistics, handbooks of information. The theory seemed to be that if enough data were provided, the student would know how to interpret them. Most of these first attempts resulted in the student response, "I never knew that."

The frame of World history remained Western in origin; it was like pouring the new wine of information into old culture-conditioned bottles. The methods used were similar to those in studying American and European history. Most of the texts and teachers during the mid-1950's accommodated themselves to the study of other culture regions by increasing the number of pages allotted to these regions, but the approach remained basically chronological and Western-centric.

By the early 1960's, it was becoming clear that "I never knew that" kinds of studies were not helping students to understand their contemporary world--in the sense of developing empathy and insights. Facts by themselves are not sufficient; more important is the context within which events and people are perceived. Just as motivation affects purpose, frame of reference affects

perspective. The unconscious preoccupation with self--the tendency to see one's own culture as the center of human life--is a barrier to the potential enrichment offered by cultural studies.

As I worked with elementary and high school teachers during the 1960's, I began to understand that Asian studies can and should be more than a subject area--that such learning should be a source of stimulation and enrichment that will help students of all ages become more self-directing as well as better informed. Students can benefit from the opportunity of learning _from_ as well as _about_ Asia.

In the early 1970's, I edited a high school series, CULTURE REGIONS OF THE WORLD, which was published by the Macmillan Company. In the teacher's guide I wrote:

> The world has changed dramatically in the last two decades. And so too must our study of other cultures. "I never _knew_ that" kinds of learning are only the beginnings of cultural studies; more concern must be extended in helping the student react, "I never _thought_ of that." This kind of learning is reflected in new methods (based more on anthropology than on history) and new materials (not only printed but also audio-visual), which are concerned with the _process_ as well as the content of studying other cultures. More teachers are beginning to realize that the _approaches_ in learning about other cultures determine to a significant degree the conclusions reached. Traditional methods of learning serve more as censors than sensers.
>
> The awareness is growing that when context and perspective are added to information, a shift in perception usually follows. Consider, for example, a student's attitude toward recommending a meat-based diet for a vegetarian culture when he understands that it takes six

times as much land to produce a steak diet as to provide cereal. His reaction will probably include an "I never thought of that" response which goes beyond factual knowledge.

Just as we have moved from "knowing" to "thinking," we must move in our studies to feeling, appreciating, and realizing. The major purpose of studying other cultures is to discover the ways in which other groups of human beings have organized their lives to answer the perennial questions of survival and fulfillment. Confucius said, "The nature of men is always the same; it is their habits which separate them." And their habits are an essential part of their culture, that human-made environment of customs and costume, of outlook and in-look. The culmination of knowing, thinking, feeling, and appreciation is realizing--an awareness of the dynamic ways in which all parts of a culture are related.

Our purpose in studying other cultures is not only to understand and value them, although these are certainly worthwhile and desirable goals. We can also, hopefully, learn more about the processes by which human societies form their attitudes and actions. The survival and fulfillment of earthly life depends upon the degree to which we can become masters rather than victims of our own behavior. By studying other cultures, we also simultaneously gain insights into our own culture from an outside view. Considered in this way, the study of other cultures becomes an integral part of an overall humanistic curriculum. "We and "they" become related, not separated.

The spirit of cultural studies must be based on respect and appreciation of differences, not on contempt. Otherwise, we will succeed only in turning "windows on the world" into magic mirrors which tell us only that we, among all cultures, are "fairest of them all." This ethnocentric approach to the study of other peoples will not only be a

> disservice to them, but it will also deprive us of the most essential ingredient for self-correction--the ability to see ourselves as others do.

Today, there is increasing understanding and agreement that cultural studies can contribute much more than only a knowledge of its subject matter. One of the greatest values of cultural studies can be to help persons transcend their own cultural conditioning. It is, after all, difficult for the mind to "change its mind" because it has been so carefully encouraged to think in prescribed ways. By encountering contrasting minds--culturally different--each mind is reminded that its viewpoint is cultural rather than natural and its potential beliefs are not limited to its cultural inheritance. This kind of awareness can encourage one's confidence and ability to shape as well as receive, to create as well as adapt to changing conditions. We can all benefit from such learning because increasingly we live in new cultures--the cultures of the future which are less and less extensions of the past. We now have the opportunity (and necessity) of being culture-creators as well as culture-inheritors.

More than ever, we need and can benefit from an enhanced "orientation:" in the verb sense "to adjust with relation to, or bring into due relation surrounding circumstances, to orient one's ideas to new conditions;" and in the noun sense of knowing more about/from the more than half the world's people who live in the Orient--the Latin (oriens) designation used for Asia by Europeans.

This "orientation" brings us back to the title of these remarks: "Asian Studies: Orienting the Student, Process, and Content." To explain what I mean, I will rely on what I wrote ten years ago in ASIA: TEACHING ABOUT/ LEARNING FROM which was published by the Teachers College Press of Columbia University:

Teachers need to be clear about their purposes in the classroom. If it is assumed that when teaching about Asian peoples and cultures the content is the subject matter, then presumably the same kinds of topics can be taught to all students, making allowances for levels of difficulty. This content-centered approach is the one generally used for American history; it might be called the "aspirin dosage" treatment, in which a full amount is dispensed at the university level and lesser amounts earlier. But basically the same historical, chronological arrangement is placed before students who work their way through it. The assumption is that there is a certain amount of content that is correctly understood by university professors who, in turn, train elementary and secondary school teachers, who can simplify this knowledge for their own students.

But what happens if the opposite assumption is made--that the student, not the content, is the subject? Then the purpose shifts. Curriculum questions then become ones of determining what kinds of Asian studies topics are appropriate for specific students at specific schooling levels.

Let us consider the curriculum as a continuum along which students pass through related school experiences. In elementary school the major emphasis will be on the student as the subject, and most subject matter is arranged to achieve behavioral changes in the learner. Asian studies in the elementary grades should concentrate on the educational purposes of helping students develop skills, positive attitudes, understandings, appreciations, and actions concerning Asian peoples and cultures.

Starting in junior high school and continuing through grades nine and ten, the major purpose of Asian studies can be to help students understand and appreciate the culture concept--the ways in which a culture functions as a whole. This kind of learning builds on what has been learned

earlier but extends students' comprehension to a more complicated series of concepts. Again, content from Asian studies will be used, but the main educational purpose will be to help students see relationships--how parts of a culture affect each other. At this level of learning "the process is the subject," that is, students are learning about a particular Asian culture, but the main purpose is to use that culture as an example of how the process of relationships within a culture can be recognized.

Beginning in grades eleven and twelve and continuing through postsecondary education, Asian studies can be used in additional ways. At these levels it is appropriate for educational purposes to shift again so that the content of Asian studies can become the major focus. Students at these school levels are beginning to choose courses of particular interest to themselves, and content should become increasingly the center of attention, culminating in graduate school where highly specialized content is the subject.

This division of the educational continuum into three parts--student, process, and content--is, of course, exaggerted for emphasis. In practice, all examples of Asian studies will include elements of content, but what is selected will depend on a teacher's educational purposes. In other words, when student and process are the subjects, a teacher's main responsibility is to use Asian studies as a means of achieving learning that transcends the particular subject matter being studied. It is as if Asian studies were parables used to help students learn lessons beyond the subject matter itself, although the content of the parable should be accurate. Students will always learn some content, but the purposes will transcend what is being offered in specific subject areas.

Teachers at all levels using this approach need to be aware of the total continuum so that they can make

appropriate adjustments in their own particular classes. For example, if a student has failed to develop or never been exposed to the kinds of learnings that should occur when "the student is the subject," then the teachers at a higher level should incorporate these purposes into the Asian studies approaches they are using. Likewise, upper secondary school teachers need to be concerned in planning their Asian studies that their students in content courses have passed through "the student is the subject" and "the process is the subject" stages.

This suggestion of how Asian studies can be presented throughout the curriculum does not, of course, minimize the importance of content. It suggests that there be a shift in how content is used, depending on educational purposes. This shift in purpose will be reflected in other educational changes: how units are organized, what kinds of materials and activities are used, and what types of evaluation will be appropriate to measure achievements other than recall of information.

This recommended pedagogical use of Asian studies applies, of course, to cultural studies generally. Also, the continuum of student, process, and content can be used in instruction beyond the secondary school. For example, during the past ten years I have been working at the community college level. I began this experience in Washington, D.C. by serving for three years as the Director of International Services at the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC) which had received a grant from the Ford Foundation to help "internationalize the curriculum" of community colleges. Until the late 1970's, few of the approximately 1,200 community colleges were much involved beyond their locality. In 1987, the AACJC included for the first time in its "Mission Statement" an endorsement for community colleges to add an international dimension.

The current motivation for attention to cultural studies in our schools and colleges is often expressed in the name of making the U.S. more competitive in the world economy. The motivation nearly forty years ago, as I mentioned earlier, was expressed in the name of national defense. Meanwhile, you and I were able then and now to advance cultural studies also in the cause of general and liberalizing education.

We had appreciated and responded to de Chardin's recognition, in the 1950's, that there is underway a "planetization of mankind" which will make us "more completely personalized and human." The progress of humanity can move in opposite (and not opposing) directions--towards a self-culture of more individualized choices but within responsible membership in our global society. We will need (and should be glad) to become our own teachers in a world where an educated self can continue the process of self-educating. No subject content can serve this purpose better than cultural studies. You and I are privileged to have a leadership position in the process.